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ABSTRACT

Several investigators, using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), have concluded that masculine is the desired sex role of males and females. Other investigators have suggested that some of the feminine BSRI items are undesirable. In order to determine if this masculine ideal might be due to the nature of the BSRI feminine items (more undesirable than the masculine items), the BSRI was administered to 121 male and 177 female college students with three feminine-neutralizing items added. Subjects were asked to rate themselves as they are now and as they would ideally be in the future. Both males and females showed a large increase in their future masculine scores and only a slight increase in future feminine-original scores. This led to a shift in frequencies toward future masculine categories. However, when the revised score was calculated, males and females showed comparable increases in both masculine and feminine items, maintaining the same relative sex roles for their present and future scores. Less than half of the BSRI items differentiated males from females. Finally, females rated the masculine item very low, and males rated the feminine item very low compared to other masculine and feminine items. These results raise several questions regarding the validity of the BSRI and previous findings which suggest that masculine is the desired sex role of males and females. (Author/JAC)

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Sex Role Desirability of College Students: Feminine Negative versus Feminine Neutral

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Abstract

Several investigators using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) have concluded that Masculine is the desired sex role of males and females. However, other investigators have noted that some of the feminine BSRI items are undesirable. The BSRI was administered to 121 male and 177 female college students with three feminine-neutralizing itmes added, and subjects were asked to rate themselves for now and future. Males and females showed a large increase in future masculine scores and only a slight increase in future feminine-original scores. This led to a shift in frequencies toward future masculine categories. However, when the revised score was calculated, both males and females showed comparable increases in masculine and feminine items so that they maintained the same relative future sex role as present. Less than half of the BSRI items differentiated males from females. Finally, females rated the "masculine" item very low and males rated the "feminine" item very low compared to other masculine and feminine items. This study raised several questions regarding the validity of the BSRI and the previous finding of masculine as the desired sex role of males and females.

Sex Role Desirability of College Students: Feminine Negative versus Feminine Neutral

The past few decades have witnessed an abundance of research in the area of sex roles and sex role identity. A sex role can be defined as a group of distinguishing attributes an individual understands to be characteristic of a male or female in his or her culture. The concept of sex role identity has traditionally been studied in terms of masculinity and femininity. However, Constantinople (1973) concluded that the concept of sex role identity is abstract, and it is difficult, as scientists, to clearly define the concept or design any acceptable instrument to measure it. Yet the concept does have a dimension of reality to it, according to Constantinople, and attempts to construct instruments to measure sex role identities have been made.

Early measurements of sex role identities emphasized the dichotomous nature of masculinity and femininity (e.g., Gough, 1952; Guilford & Zimmerman, 1949; Terman & Miles, 1936). However, as a clearer definition of these concepts emerged, a third dimension labelled "androgyny" was proposed as the co-existence of feminine and masculine traits within a single individual.

Sandra Bem (1974) first presented the model of psychological androgyny, stating that a fully effective, healthy, and functioning human would have a balance or integration of both masculinity and femininity, where one is tempered by the other. Bem devised a sex role inventory to assess the extent to which the culture's definitions of desirable female and male attributes are reflected in an individual's self-description. The inventory supplies both a masculine score and a feminine score. Bem attempted to represent

both masculinity and femininity as "positive domains of behavior" with 20 descriptive characteristics for each scale. Each attribute was considered to be desirable for a man or woman in American society. When the relative masculine and feminine scores are calculated and multiplied by a t ratio (Bem, 1974) the two scales yield five sex role categories: masculine, near masculine, androgynous, near feminine, and feminine.

While each attribute on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was considered to be desirable for a man or woman in American society, the use of the BSRI to rate the ideal sex role has shown a trend toward the masculine as preferred or desired. Murray (1976) found that women, when describing their real and ideal selves, showed a greater increase in rating of masculine items than feminine items when moving from real to ideal self. Also, fewer women ideally wanted to be stereotypically feminine than existed for the real self. Gilbert, Strahan, and Deutsch (1978) noted that the women in their study described the ideal woman as being as masculine as the ideal man. Jones, Chernovetz, and Hansson (1978) found that subjects, when asked to rate their preference in remaining the same or having more or less of an attribute listed on the BSRI, showed a greater increase in desired masculine attributes than feminine attributes.

Masculinity, as the preferred sex role in these studies, may be due to the nature of the BSRI rather than an actual preference for masculinity over femininity. The social desirability of several of the Feminine scale items has been questioned. A factor analysis of the BSRI by Waters, Waters, and Pincus (1977) showed that five of the Feminine scale items did not load with the other items. They recommended deleting the Feminine scale items: "child-like," "gullible," "shy," "soft-spoken," and "does not use harsh language."

Pedhazur and Tetenbaum (1979) found the mean rating for desirability of the Feminine scale items on the BSRI tend to be lower than the mean rating for desirability of the Masculine scale items. In addition, some Feminine scale items ("shy," "gullible," and "childlike") were actually perceived as negative in social desirability. Therefore, the lower social desirability of the Feminine scale may be directly attributed to these specific items.

Puglisi (1980) showed that these same three items loaded negatively on a femininity factor. He concluded that the difference in social desirability between the Masculine and Feminine scales of the BSRI was attributable to these three items. He revised the Feminine scale of the BSRI by replacing the items "shy," "gullible," and "childlike" with three characteristics of greater social desirability, i.e., "graceful," "charming," and "gracious." With the revised Feminine scale, the mean ratings for social desirability of the Feminine scale was not significantly different from that of the Masculine scale.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the previously found masculine ideal was due to the feminine items on the BSRI being more undesirable than the masculine items. It was hypothesized that when rating both the real and ideal self using the original BSRI Feminine scale items a shift toward the masculine ideal would be found as in previous studies. However, if the feminine-negative items "shy," "gullible," and "childlike" were replaced with the items "gracious," "graceful," and "charming" which neutralize the social desirability differences between the Masculine and Feminine BSRI scales (Puglisi, 1980), then a shift toward the masculine-ideal might not occur.

Method

Subjects. Participants in the study were 177 female and 121 male college students enrolled in freshman and sophomore level classes at West Texas State University. Participation was voluntary and each class received feedback about the results of the study.

Procedure. The Bem Sex Role Inventory was administered with the items "charming," "gracious," and "graceful" added in random positions. The subjects were asked to rate themselves on each item as they are now and also as they ideally would like to be in the future. The BSRI was scored using the Masculine scale items, the Feminine-original scale items, and the Feminine-revised scale items where the original items "shy," "gullible," and "childlike" were replaced with the new items "gracious," "graceful," and "charming." Sex role categories were calculated using Bem's t ratio.

Results

The BSRI raw scale scores were analysed with a 2 (sex) x 3 (sex role scale) x 2 (now-future) split plot factorial unweighted means analysis of variance (Kirk, 1968). There were no overall sex differences between males and females. However there was a significant sex x sex role scale interaction, F (2, 592) = 101.2, $p < .01$. Scheffe means comparison tests revealed that males rated masculine attributes significantly higher than feminine attributes, and females rated feminine attributes significantly higher than masculine attributes. Figure 1 shows this effect both for now and ideal future scores.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The main effect of sex role scale was also significant, F (2, 592) = 56.9, $p < .01$. Scheffe's test revealed that each of the three sex role scale scores was significantly different from the other. The Feminine-original scale score was the lowest (101.5), followed by the Masculine scale score (104.8), with the Feminine-revised scale score being the highest (108.3). Replacing the feminine-negative items with the new feminine items raised the Feminine scale from significantly lower than the Masculine scale to significantly higher than the Masculine scale.

The main effect of now-future was also significant, F (1, 296) = 721.8, $p < .01$. As Figure 1 shows, subjects generally scored higher when rating attributes for how they ideally would like to be in the future compared to their rating of attributes for how they are now. However, as Figure 1 also shows, exactly how much higher the ideal future scores were compared to the now scores depended on the Feminine sex role scale. This was indicated by the significant sex role scale x now-future interaction, F (2, 592) = 116.9, $p < .01$. Scheffe tests revealed that this effect was due to a large increase from now to future Masculine scale scores for both males and females with only a slight increase in Feminine-original scale scores from now to future. When calculating the relative sex role classification scores, this interaction led to a shift in frequencies away from feminine toward masculine for females and toward masculine for males (Table 1). The increase from now to future Feminine-revised BSRI scale score was comparable to the increase from now to future Masculine scale score (Figure 1). Therefore, when calculating the sex role classification scores using the revised Feminine scale, males and females maintained approximately

the same relative ideal future sex role as present sex role.

Insert Table 1 about here

It appears that while males and females increased future self ratings for both the Masculine and Feminine-revised scales, they must have rated the three items in question on the original Feminine scale ("shy," "gullible," and "childlike") lower in the future in order for such an interaction to appear. To assess which items were rated lower and higher for the future ratings as compared to the now ratings, and to assess which items differentiated males from females, each BSRI original and revised item was subjected to a 2 (sex) x 2 (now-future) split plot unweighted means analysis of variance (Kirk, 1968). Scheffe tests were conducted on any significant interactions. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Males and females showed a significant decrease from now to future ratings of the three Feminine-negative items of "shy," "gullible," and "childlike," confirming earlier predictions that these attributes are not desirable. Males showed a significant increase from now to future ratings of the rest of the feminine attributes except for the attributes of "feminine," "soft-spoken," "yielding," and "no harsh language." Females also showed a significant increase in each of the feminine items from now to future except for "yielding," and "no harsh language."

Concerning the masculine items, males showed a significant increase in all of the masculine attributes from now to future. Females also showed a significant increase in ratings of all the masculine items from now to future except for the items "masculine" and "dominant." Females' rating of the item "masculine" showed a significant decrease from now to future, suggesting that this attribute may also be undesirable for females. There was no change in females' rating of the item "dominant" from now to future. It is obvious from Table 2 that males rated the item "feminine" much lower than all the other items, and females rated the item "masculine" much lower than all of the other items. This finding suggests that the opposite sex role attribute label is undesirable for both males and females.

In assessing which items differentiated males from females, Table 2 shows that only six of the original BSRI feminine items, overall, were rated significantly higher by females than males. In addition, males rated the feminine item "shy" significantly higher than the females. Males rated eight of the masculine items, overall, significantly higher than the females. However, females rated the masculine attribute "individualistic" significantly higher than the males. Finally, females rated only two of the three new feminine items significantly higher than males.

Discussion

The results of this study, taken as a whole, raise some questions regarding the validity of the BSRI and the previous suggestion that masculine is the desired sex role of males and females. First, the masculine ideal found in previous studies appears to be due to the undesirability of some of the feminine attributes in the BSRI rather than any particular desire

for masculine attributes over feminine attributes. Replacing just three feminine items out of twenty eliminated the masculine ideal affect. However, this study does not solve the problem of social desirability of the feminine BSRI items. Replacing the three feminine-negative items with the new feminine items caused the Feminine scale scores to be significantly higher than the Masculine scale scores. Future research should focus on equalizing the desirability of the Feminine and Masculine scales. While some attempts have recently been made to equalize the desirability of the two scales (e.g. Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979; Puglisi, 1980), the studies have generally raised more questions than answers. However, it does not appear that the masculine ideal can be taked for granted at this time.

Secondly, fewer than half of the original BSRI items reliably differentiated males from females, even though they were originally selected by Bem (1974) as attributes considered to be desirable for a male or female in American society. While this finding leaves the concept of sex role identity as measured by the BSRI somewhat illusive, an even more damaging finding is that at least one item on each scale was rated higher by the opposite sex, i.e., "shy" for males and "individualistic" for females. These findings would seem to leave Bem's sex role category classifications as somewhat nebulous and arbitrary.

Finally, comes the question of the single attributes "masculine" and "feminine." Pedhazur and Tetenbaum (1979) noted that these two items seem to be the major differentiating items between males and females. The results of this study would support their conclusion. Males do not want to be feminine and females do not want to be masculine, either now or in

the future. This finding sharply contrasts the result that both males and females rate themselves considerably higher on the other attributes categorized as masculine and feminine, and that both males and females seem to want more of both masculine and feminine attributes in the future. Regardless of how experimenters are categorizing the attributes as masculine or feminine, subjects do not seem to equate the other masculine and feminine attributes with the individual attributes "masculine" and "feminine."

In conclusion, the development of sex role measuring instruments, such as the BSRI, has led to an abundance of research over the past few decades that neatly packaged masculine, androgynous, and feminine persons. This study suggests that the packages may be somewhat mislabelled and may not reach their destination until they are labelled more clearly.

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Table 1

Percentage of Males and Females in Bem's Sex Role Classifications using the Feminine-Original and the Feminine-Revised Scales

	Feminine-original			
	Males		Females	
Classification	Now	Future	Now	Future
Masculine	24	43	8	9
Near Masculine	22	37	8	19
Androgynous	39	17	31	48
Near Feminine	8	3	22	16
Feminine	7	0	31	8
	Feminine-revised			
Masculine	13	15	5	3
Near Masculine	22	26	7	5
Androgynous	42	52	28	34
Near Feminine	16	5	19	25
Feminine	7	2	41	33

Table 2

Mean Score on each BSRI Item by Males and Females for Now and Future[a]

	BSRI Feminine Items				
	Males		Females		Highest
Attribute	Now	Future	Now	Future	In*
Feminine	1.46	1.34	5.35	6.18*	Females
Sympathetic	5.38	5.84*	5.60	6.23*	Females
Sensitive	5.35	6.22*	5.63	6.59*	Females
Compassionate	5.16	6.12*	5.57	6.35*	Females
Eager to Sooth	5.36	6.10*	5.69	6.31*	Females
Tender	5.11	5.84*	5.41	6.24*	Females
Affectionate	5.39	6.26*	5.64	6.40*	
Cheerful	5.24	6.33*	5.32	6.57*	
Flatterable	4.50	4.65*	4.35	4.66*	
Loyal	5.89	6.68*	6.09	6.72*	
Understanding	5.44	6.36*	5.62	6.50*	
Warm	5.36	6.17*	5.35	6.37*	
Loves Children	5.71	6.30*	5.95	6.53*	
Gentle	5.43	6.32*	5.49	6.44*	
Soft-Spoken	4.19	4.17	3.82	4.43*	
Yielding	4.50	4.57	4.50	4.55	
No Harsh Language	4.31	4.35	4.10	4.27	
Shy	4.29*	2.62	3.81*	2.32	Males
Childlike	3.09*	2.46	3.04*	2.19	
Gullible	3.48*	2.43	4.01*	2.20	Females-Now
Graceful (new)	4.32	5.83*	4.43	6.28*	Females
Gracious (new)	4.84	5.93*	5.27	6.47*	Females
Charming (new)	4.38	5.77*	4.31	5.87*	

Table 2 (Continued)

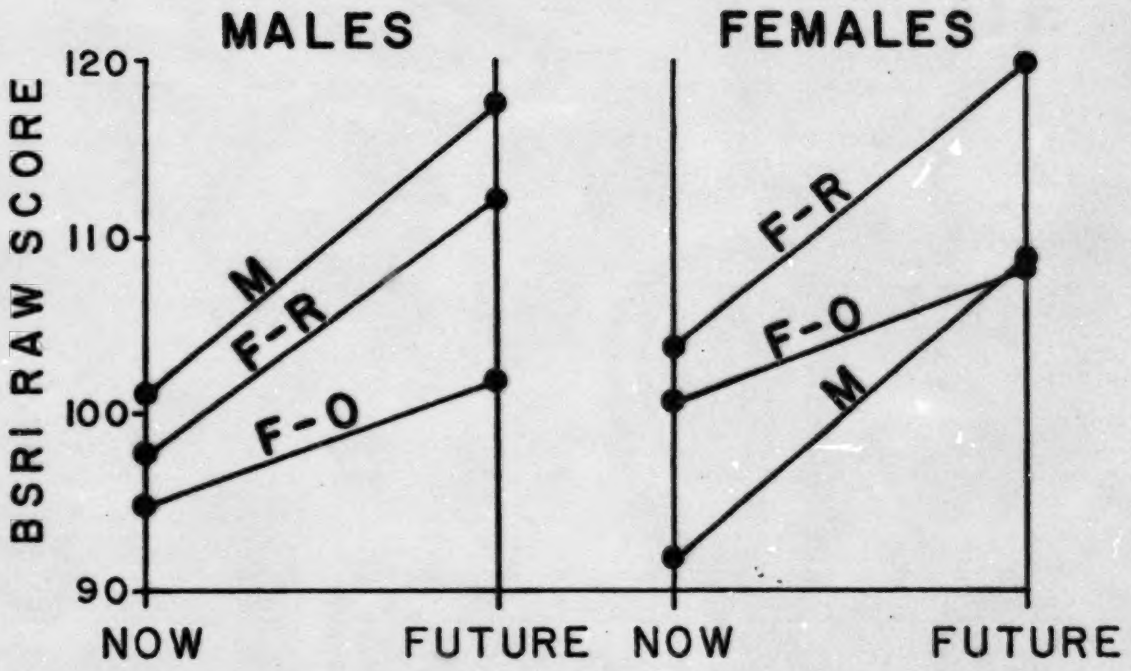
Attribute	Males		Females		Highest In*
	Now	Future	Now	Future	
BSRI Masculine Items					
Masculine	5.77	6.35*	1.91*	1.66	Males
Athletic	5.36	6.09*	4.07	5.50*	Males
Leadership Ability	5.08	6.39*	4.67	6.07*	Males
Takes Risks	4.95	5.36*	4.65	4.97*	Males
Dominant	4.11	4.63*	3.77	3.59	Males
Aggressive	4.41	5.07*	4.01	4.41*	Males
Acts as a Leader	4.41	5.84*	4.11	5.48*	Males
Competitive	5.54	5.88*	4.80	5.25*	Males
Makes Decisions Easily	4.64	6.13*	3.97	6.04*	Males-Now
Individualistic	5.09	5.75*	5.32	6.16*	Females
Self-Reliant	5.48	6.45*	5.32	6.54*	
Defends Beliefs	5.59	6.55*	5.70	6.64*	
Independent	5.31	6.26*	5.37	6.34*	
Assertive	4.44	5.87*	4.33	5.60*	
Strong Personality	5.31	6.31*	5.33	6.36*	
Forceful	3.64	4.20*	3.51	3.80*	
Analytical	4.74	5.46*	4.48	5.26*	
Self-Sufficient	5.12	6.55*	5.30	6.50*	
Takes a Stand	5.45	6.22*	5.25	6.21*	
Ambitious	5.66	6.48*	5.51	6.49*	

[a] 1 = never or almost never true; 2 = usually not true; 3 = sometimes but infrequently true; 4 = occasionally true; 5 = often true; 6 = usually true; 7 = always or almost always true.

*Significantly higher, $p < .05$.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Raw scores on the Masculine (M), Feminine-Original (F-O), and Feminine-Revised (F-R) scales of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) for males and females.


MALES
FEMALES
BSRI RAW SCORE
120
110
100
90
M
F-R
F-O
F-R
F-O
M
NOW
FUTURE
NOW
FUTURE